



## **ROY CHARLES BROOKS**

**County Commissioner**

**Precinct No. 1**

### **Statement of Commissioner Roy C. Brooks House Redistricting Committee June 6, 2013**

My name is Roy C. Brooks, and I serve as Commissioner of Tarrant County Commissioners Court Precinct 1. I am African American, and my district includes virtually every predominately African American neighborhood in Tarrant County and many of the large and growing Latino neighborhoods in our County.

I have tried very, very hard to participate fully in the redistricting process throughout the entire time I have been in public service and particularly over the past two years. During these past two years, I have seen State leaders work deliberately and maliciously to undermine the voting strength of African American and Latino citizens in Tarrant County and all across Texas. In good faith, I have traveled to Austin several times to give testimony on very short notice only to learn that State leaders had no real interest in my views or the concerns of those I represent.

Now, I have traveled to Dallas after learning barely two days ago when and where this hearing would be held. And, while you are conducting the hearing in Dallas, the city of Fort Worth is large enough to merit its own hearing to accommodate the views of Tarrant County citizens who don't have the means to travel.

Also, you have made it practically impossible for most members of the public to know and understand exactly what they are being asked to comment upon today. You have presented eight different bills. Some are a combination of the current interim plans, some are individual interim plans and some others are newly proposed plans. To say it is confusing is charitable. To say it constitutes callous and indifferent treatment of the public would be more accurate.

I too am concerned about the assignment you've been given by the Governor in revisiting redistricting. I have had a chance to read the actual language of Governor Perry's call for a Special Session. I have read the comments of Legislative leaders laying out their intentions on redistricting. It is apparent that the hearings and the testimony being taken is an example of State leaders simply going through the motions – just checking the box.

You have been directed by the Governor to adopt the exact boundaries of the interim redistricting plans for the State House, Congress and the State Senate. The only one of these three plans that does not include violations of the US Voting Rights Act is the State Senate plan. The other two plans retain badly flawed features identified by the federal court in Washington, DC as either retrogressive or the product of a discriminatory process.

It really doesn't matter if you hold one hearing or five hearings or 20 hearings, if you end up where you began and pass the congressional and State House plans unchanged, the entire process will have been little more than political theater.

Quite frankly, Texas State leaders have forfeited basic trust with Texas voters. In 2011, you adopted congressional and legislative maps that undermined African American and Latino voting strength across our state. You ignored the concerns and silenced the voices of elected officials who represent minority districts and violated the voting rights of their constituents. All three of the maps adopted were ruled to be retrogressive and two of the three were rule to have been enacted with an intentional discriminatory purpose.

There were so many examples of malicious actions against African American and Latino Texans that the federal court noted – and I quote from their opinion – “The parties have provided more evidence of discriminatory intent than we have space, or need, to address here.”

Sadly, our Texas State leaders are the only state and legislative leaders in the entire country who adopted redistricting plans that intentionally discriminated against the minority citizens of their state.

Worst still, rather than accepting the ruling of the federal court, our State leaders have asked the United States Supreme Court to strike down Section 5 of the US Voting Rights Act. Instead of accepting and abiding by the key law that protects minority citizens, you are asking that it be struck down. As we meet here today, not a single Republican State leader or member of the Legislature has asked Attorney General Abbott to withdraw his legal motion attacking the US Voting Right Act.

Regrettably, given your history and your current hostility to the laws that protect my constituents, I'm sure you can understand why I and so many other Texans don't trust your intentions.

Even so, I am prepared in good faith to give you my views as a senior minority elected official on the interim congressional plan.

Under the interim plan, there are four districts where African American citizens have demonstrated the ability to elect their candidate of choice. Two of these four districts are here in North Texas and are District 30 represented by Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson and District 33 represented by Congressman Marc Veasey.

In the 2012 Democratic Primary and Democratic Primary run-off, African American voters comprised a majority of the votes cast in District 33. Congressman Veasey was clearly the candidate of choice of African American voters. In the general election, African American and Latino voters united in support of Congressman Veasey, and he was easily elected.

In District 30, Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson has been the candidate of choice of African American voters in every election since 1992.

Clearly, Districts 30 and 33 must be retained as districts where African Americans can elect their candidate of choice.

However, there are over 2.2 million African American and Latino residents in Dallas and Tarrant Counties combined. Over 1.3 million are Latino. It is clearly possible to draw an effective Latino district in north Texas while preserving districts 30 and 33 as effective African American districts.

The federal court in Washington, DC noted the lack of a Latino district in north Texas as a flaw in the State's map. That same flaw exists in the interim map and should be corrected.

There are two plans before you now that satisfactorily accomplish this goal – one proposed by Representative Yvonne Davis and the other proposed by Representative Rafael Anchia. I call on you to embrace the approach taken in these two maps.

The interim congressional map should not be an ending point. It should be a starting point from which you work to configure districts that fairly and legally reflect the racial and political makeup of Texas. I challenge you to regain the trust and faith of Texans you have forfeited by drawing new minority districts that empower the minority citizens that you have so far undermined and disrespected.

I have great respect for our democratic system and great love for the State of Texas. I know that Texans deserve a better process than the one being you have pursued to date.